

## CHAOS IN OUR SOUL

Proposal for researching and scripting a one-hour film about St. Petersburg

Four out of five Russians are said to be living below the poverty level. A power struggle in Moscow has nearly paralyzed the government as ultranationalist forces try to capitalize on the disarray. Looking at their new world of brazen crime, unchecked corruption, soaring prices and unprincipled profiteering, many Russians have begun to wonder whether democracy and the free market were really worth fighting for (Washington Post, August 19)

The most effective anti-reform front is the National Salvation Front. At their rallies, czarist flags and Christian icons can be seen weirdly waving in the air alongside red flags. "We don't have guns yet, but we will, and pretty soon, too, I assure you"--Viktor Anpilov, former foreign television correspondent (Los Angeles Times, August 20)

"All this is a reflection of what is going on in our souls. We lack an ideology. It's a chaos in our soul"--Olga Kulikovskiy-Romanoff, one of the twenty remaining members of the Russian royal family, now living in Toronto.

Canada has been involved in all three of the major crises that have devastated Russia in this century. The Borden government sent in troops with the Allied expeditionary force to fight communism after the 1917 Revolution. The King government sent in military supplies to help Stalin fight Hitler in World War II. And since the coming to power of Boris Yeltsin, the Mulroney-Campbell government has been collaborating with the efforts of the Group of 7 to keep the regime financially solvent. But now, individual Canadians are starting to participate on a significant scale for first time in the Russian drama--some by profiting from the collapse of communism, and others by sending aid to the victims.

I propose a one-hour film portrait of city in which that drama and that participation are being most visually played out. St. Petersburg has been Russia's "window to the West" since it was founded on the marshes of the Neva River by Peter the Great in 1703. It has been the home of some of Russia's greatest writers and musicians--Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Turgenev, Akhmatova, Mussorgsky, Rubinstein, Prokofiev, Shostakovich. It was the scene of the Revolution of 1917, and of the legendary siege of 1942-44. And today it is the focal point of Canadian involvement.

Bryant Bramson is the very agitated President of Tangerine Clothes of Montreal. In his impressive fifth floor executive suite, overlooking the garment district north of Cremazie Boulevard, he says that Russia is the fastest-growing market in his company's

annual sales of \$600 million. He ships a container of clothes every month--mostly colourful dresses and sweaters. "No shorts. Russian girls want to make a statement. They are willing to put a month's earnings into a sweater that will make an impression. We are teaching them fashion." He has a Russian sales force, and store fronts in Moscow and St. Petersburg. He goes over every two months to talk business "with the powers that be.....We got started two years ago when a man from Moscow walked into my office with 100 million dollars to spend, and asked me if I could sell him some clothes."

Commissioner Wesley Harris is the very cool head of the Salvation Army in Canada. He also has an impressive fifth-floor office in the Army's sparkling new headquarters across the street from Toronto's City Hall. He talks about the 20 "feeding stations" the Army has set up in Moscow and St. Petersburg since 1991. "We have 26 ex-patriate officers in Russia now, giving 6-month crash courses to Russian professionals. We commission about 10 of them every month. 20 of them have formed a brass band in St. Petersburg, where we have a congregation of about 600 people. I got Ed Mirvish to contribute 500 toys to their children last Christmas." Captain Jeff and Mrs. Sandra Harris of Guelph, Ontario, are in charge of the St. Petersburg mission. "They saw our video-tapes about the strong spiritual hunger and social needs of the Russian people when they were down from their mission in Canyon City, northern B.C., and asked if they could go."

Olga Kulikovsky-Romanoff runs the biggest Russian aid programme in the country. She calls it the "H.I.H. Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna Memorial Fund", after her mother-in-law, who lies buried in the cemetery of North York. Since the collapse of the Soviet system in 1991, Olga Kulikovsky-Romanoff and her husband, the nephew of the last czar, managed to get wealthy individuals and corporations to donate enough cash and material to fill eight 40-foot containers. Her husband Tihon died four months ago. He left his wife with an apartment in Etobicoke full of toy soldiers of the Russian imperial army, and portraits of his royal ancestors.

Olga is a very warm, astute and attractive woman in her mid-sixties. She talks of the orphanages and neurological clinics she has visited and is aiding in Moscow and St. Petersburg. "We only help the under-privileged. In normal times, we Russians can be as prosperous as anybody. Before the Revolution, a Russian merchant could take over any restaurant he wanted for an evening in Paris. You know, Lenin brought about the Revolution to revenge his brother's execution as a radical in 1887. The reason communism failed was that it was anti-religious. Did you know that my church proclaimed Nicholas II a saint in 1981? Mayor Sobchuk of St. Petersburg, an ex-communist, wants to move the czar's body from its present grave in the Urals to St. Petersburg, so that he can invite the royal houses of Europe to a re-burial ceremony. He only wants to promote his own political career. I can make sure that no royalty attends."

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Olga's church is called the "Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia". It was formed by the large community of Russian exiles in Serbia in 1927 when the Patriarch of Moscow ordered church members in the Soviet Union to collaborate with Stalin's regime, even though it had killed an estimated 60,000 Orthodox monks and priests. The Church Outside of Russia now has a Synod of 18 bishops representing the Russian diaspora around western Europe and the two American continents. In 1985, that Synod, meeting in New York City, elected the Bishop of Montreal as the new Primate of the Church Outside of Russia. So the centre of resistance to the Patriarch of Moscow is now in St. Nicholas Cathedral, a former synagogue on St. Joseph Boulevard in Outremont!

The Primate, Archbishop Vitaly Oustinow, was born in St. Petersburg in 1910, and moved to Crimea the following year when his father became admiral of the imperial navy in the Black Sea. Ten years later, at the height of the Russian Civil War, his father organized the escape by sea of 200,000 Old Believers from Crimea to Serbia. The Kulikovsky-Romanoff family was among them. After the assassination of King Alexander and the establishment of a republic in Yugoslavia in 1934, Vitaly Oustinow wandered to Czechoslovakia, Germany, France, England and Brazil before finally settling in Montreal in 1957.

In Archbishop Vitaly's study is a portrait of him painted when he was a young priest in Serbia. His face has the serenity and confidence of Christ himself. Today he is an enwizened and embittered old man. Like all Old Believers, he is convinced that the state of chaos in Russia today is only the latest form of a crisis that the mother country has suffered continuously since Peter the Great usurped the power of the Patriarch as head of the Church, and opened up Russia to the godless influence of the West by moving the capital from holy Moscow to St. Petersburg, "the new Babylon". "The Russian people have been chosen by God to propagate the true Christian faith, which is why before Peter, the Church was the dominant power. It could make or break czars, two of whom had even been sons of Patriarchs. Russia will not solve its crisis until the ex-communist Yeltsin is replaced by an elected Monarch, and the true church becomes the dominant power again in Moscow."

Of course, neither Peter the Great nor any of his successors as autocratic rulers had any trouble finding church leaders that would collaborate. The present Patriarch of Moscow, Alexei II, has followers in Montreal who attend the St. Peter--St. Paul Russian Orthodox church opposite the CBC on Rene Levesque Boulevard.

So the two rival Orthodox congregations in Montreal represent a struggle between two ideologies that have been vying for power in Russia for almost 300 years. All Russian thinkers, artists and policy-makers have been dragged into it. The "slavophiles" have tended to see Russia as having a spiritual mission in the world, requiring an Islamic-type of theocratic state, with the capital in Moscow, where church domes dominate the skyline, and where there is a safe distance from the evil influences of the materialist West.



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The "Westernizers" have tended to see Russia as having a secular reforming mission in the world, requiring an enlightened autocracy, with the capital in St. Petersburg, where the spires of state and military establishments dominate the skyline, and where there is easy access by sea to the West.

There is a building in St. Petersburg where these two ideologies come face to face. It is an old church which Stalin had converted to an electrical manufacturing plant. Mayor Sobchuk has returned the main body of the church to the followers of the Patriarch of Moscow, but has granted the basement to the followers of the Primate of Montreal. The struggle between the basement and the main floor is being waged with material aid from Montreal. Each Montreal church has its own aid programme.

The leader of the Primate's aid programme in Montreal is a very likeable Russian-Canadian called Peter Paganozzi. His near-white hair and moustache, and his relaxed, cheerful disposition make you think what a good Santa Claus he'd be. He is Vice-President of Petrifond Foundations, an engineering firm with headquarters in the Town of Mount Royal. He was born in Montreal 45 years ago, went to English schools, and has an engineering degree from McGill. He has never been to Russia, but he speaks Russian at home, and regards it as his mother tongue. His ancestors immigrated from Italy to Moscow around 1840. His grandfather was a Russian Orthodox priest who fled to Serbia after the Revolution, along with the Kulikovskys-Romanoffs and the Oustinovs.

Some 40 members of Peter's church on St. Joseph Boulevard gather once every second month, on a Saturday morning, to package and label boxes of food, seeds, clothes and medicine. A communal meal is served when the packing is finished.

The leader of the Moscow Patriarch's aid programme in Montreal is a very tense, hungry-looking platinum blonde called Anna Saakian. She was born in St. Petersburg some 40 years ago, and was trained there as a civil engineer. She has been in Westmount for 10 years operating a beauty salon on Greene Avenue. Without the enthusiastic support from her congregation that Paganozzi gets from his, she has had to rely mainly on the generosity of non-Russians. Her principal benefactors have been her wealthy Jewish clients in the beauty salon. Her attempt to involve Sun Youth seems to have failed, but she has recently made a major scoop in the person of Eric Trigg, the retired Senior Vice-President of Alcan of Canada.

Eric Trigg, a distinguished-looking, grey-haired man of culture, has friends on senior levels of government in both Ottawa and Moscow. Anna found out somehow that the Russian Embassy in Ottawa had asked him for help in obtaining medical equipment for some hospital in St. Petersburg, and had put him in touch with the Salvation Army for receiving and delivering the equipment on its arrival in Russia. Anna offered to help get donations from the Jewish General, and Trigg agreed. They look upon this as the beginning of a long-term partnership between Alcan, the Orthodox

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church of the Patriarchy, and the Salvation Army! They will have a container on the next MOR ship leaving Montreal for St. Petersburg.

So will Peter Paganozzi.

So will Bryant Bramson.

So will Olga Kulikovsky-Ramonoff.

Bramson's and Kulikovsky-Ramonoff's containers will be bigger than the other two. And their rivalry may soon outshadow that between the other two. Bramson is in the spearhead of a possible corporate take-over of the Russian economy. Macdonald's, Northern Telecom, Bombardier, Pratt & Whitney, SNC-Lavalin, and Spar Aerospace--all Canadian companies-- are already there, with many others soon to follow.

Kulikovsky-Ramonoff, on the other hand, is working to help overcome Russia's chaos of the soul and build a will to resist the corporate take-over. Although a member of the Church Outside of Russia, she meets with the Patriarch of Moscow and the Metropolitan of St. Petersburg whenever she is in Russia in an effort to mend the split. She thinks Metropolitan Ioann of St. Petersburg and Archbishop Vitaly of Montreal speak similarly about the menace of foreign investment, and is trying to get them to meet. If she succeeds, she will have helped to move the field of battle between Westernizers and slavophiles from inside the church to a much bigger realm.

Her major stumbling block may be Patriarch Alexei II. He has got Yeltsin's support for a pending law restricting the registration of foreign religions. Olga thinks this law is aimed principally at the Church Outside of Russia, the main challenge to the Patriarch's authority, rather than at the western evangelical churches now flooding the country. Anna Saakian's readiness to collaborate with Alcan and the Salvation Army would seem to support this view.

The setting for this film will be St. Petersburg. Here is George Kennan's classic description of the city:

One of the strangest, loveliest, most terrible, and most dramatic of the world's great urban centres. The high northern latitude, the extreme slant of the sun's rays, the flatness of the terrain, the frequent breaking of the landscape by wide, shimmering expanses of water: all these combine to accent the horizontal at the expense of the vertical and to create everywhere the sense of immense space, distance, and power....Cleaving the city down the centre, the cold waters of the Neva move silently and swiftly, like a slab of smooth grey metal, bringing with them the tang of the lonely wastes of forests and swampt from which they have emerged. At every hand one feels the proximity of the great wilderness of the Russian

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north--silent, somber, infinitely patient. In such a city the attention of man is forced inward upon himself....Human relationships attain a strange vividness and intensity, with a touch of premonition.

The main characters will be some Canadians and their Russian contacts who are caught up in the dramatic struggle for the soul of new Russia now being waged on the streets of that city.

There may be one major St. Petersburg film character of a semi-fictional, multi-dimensional quality. Igor Fokin is a superb puppeteer that I found performing in Harvard Square this summer (see the attached article from the Boston Globe). He is a professional Chekovian actor, about 30 years old, and has a face that expresses beautifully his love for the puppets and the people for whom they perform. He is returning to his St. Petersburg home next month, to prepare for the annual Christmas show in his Wooden Horse Puppet Theatre, where he creates his own characters, carves them out of wood, scripts and performs their acts. He shares an apartment with his painter-wife, their two young sons (promising musicians and actors), his father-in-law (an established St. Petersburg painter), and his mother-in-law (fluent in English).

Igor would be willing to collaborate with me in conceiving puppet characters and acts that could add light relief to the story of my film and make it a joy to follow.

I will need four weeks of research in St. Petersburg, plus two weeks of preparation and two weeks of scripting on my return. The most productive time for me to be there would be when Olga Kulikovsky-Romanoff is there. She left Toronto for St. Petersburg on August 23, and will be there for three months.

Jerry Bruck strongly recommends Svetlana Svistunova, a Moscow resident, as guide-interpreter. He just completed working with her for four months there on a film series he is scripting about Russian writers. He feels she could obtain from an innocuous, neutral party the letter of invitation that the Russian consulate in Montreal needs for a visa, that she could find a suitable apartment in St. Petersburg for \$600 a month, that she would sense easily what people I needed to see and would be able to line them up, and that she would work around the clock for \$500 a week.

Martin Dubrow  
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